

**VANDAL PROOF SYSTEM FOR SECURING
STONE PRODUCTS TO SUPPORTING STRUCTURE**

[01] This invention pertains to a system and method for securing stone or other similar frangible material to a supporting structure in a secure manner which leaves a neat, visually uninterrupted surface that is virtually vandal proof. In addition, the stone may be removed and reinstalled at least once while retaining the foregoing advantageous characteristics.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[02] Although the system and method of the invention may be used in many environments it will be described in the context of securing a stone faceplate to a columbarium wall.

[03] Columbariums are coming into increasing use for the reasons mentioned in U.S. patent application 09/665,148. As illustrated and described in that patent application a columbarium usually consists of a supporting structure, almost always a metal frame, which is arranged to provide a plurality of columbarium niches. Each niche is of a size to receive a receptacle containing cremains and, if desired, other objects which the deceased or family members desire to be entombed therewith. The final, exterior closure member for each niche is a faceplate. Since a columbarium may take several years to be fully utilized each niche needs to be identified, repeatedly accessed and secured. The individual faceplates which

comprise the columbarium must however present the same dignified external visual appearance to the eye of an observer at all times; i.e.: from the day in which the construction of the columbarium is complete until all niches have been utilized, and beyond.

[04] At the present time securement of the faceplate to the supporting structure is achieved by the use of a bolt or stud device and a rosette that functions as a glorified nut. Because stone products tend to be quite brittle it is impossible to tighten down these rosettes lest the corners break off the stone product. Hence the rosettes become easy prey for prying fingers and are quite easily removed, creating a maintenance problem at least and a niche intrusion at most.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[05] In the system and method of the invention a niche faceplate made of stone or other frangible material is initially tightly secured to a supporting structure using a fastening assembly which includes standard, off the shelf components. In this condition the visual appearance to the eye of an observer is that of a dignified, completely assembled structure. Indeed, by using conventional design means, such as style lines which disguise access to the fastening assembly, the fastening assemblies may be indistinguishable from the surrounding areas from a very short distance away. When it is desired to gain access to the niche for the purpose of placing an urn or other container therein, the fastening assembly is loosened by use of a conventional tool which has been slightly modified to foil vandals, the faceplate

removed, the urn placed therein and then the faceplate repositioned in front of and covering the niche. Upon reassembly of the faceplate to the supporting structure the fastening assembly is again tightened to the same or even a greater degree than the original tight fit, and, as a consequence, re-access to the niche again becomes quite difficult, though not with the specialized tool described herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[06] The invention is illustrated more or less diagrammatically in the accompanying drawing in which:

[07] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a faceplate in a columbarium as it appears to the eye of an observer in both its initial tightened but accessible condition and in its final tightened condition;

[08] Figure 2 is an exploded view of a horizontal section through a faceplate, a metal supporting structure of a columbarium and the fastening assembly for securing the faceplate to the supporting structure;

[09] Figure 3 is a section to a larger scale through the faceplate, a niche (or niche means), supporting structure and fastening assembly in a tightly secured condition;

[10] Figure 4 is a side view of the tool for activating the fastening assembly;

[11] Figure 5 is a left end view of the tool of Figure 4 to an enlarged scale taken substantially along the line of 5-5 of Figure 4;

[12] Figure 6 is a partial side view of the left end of the tool with a portion broken away for clarity taken substantially along the line 6-6 of Figure 5; and

[13] Figure 7 is a partial front view of Figure 3 taken substantially along the line 7-7 of Figure 3.

DESCRIPTION OF A SPECIFIC EMBODIMENT

[14] In the following description of a specific embodiment of the invention like reference numerals will refer to like or similar features from Figure to Figure of the drawing.

[15] Referring first to Figure 1 a faceplate for a columbarium niche is indicated generally at 10. The faceplate 10 is formed of stone or other suitable frangible material. The faceplate could even be formed of material of a quite different nature, such as metal, but stone and stone-type materials present the most challenging environment due to their inherent tendency to fracture and spall and hence stone has been chosen for description since it is the most demanding environment. A rectangular shape has been shown for purposes of description but it will be understood that the invention is applicable to any other suitable configuration, such as hexagonal. A top edge is indicated at 11 and a side edge at 12, said top edge being of the same thickness as the bottom edge of a similar faceplate located directly above faceplate 10. The side edges similarly conform to the side edges of adjacent faceplates. Two grooves, or style lines, are indicated generally at 13 and 14 each style line extending, in this instance, the full height of the faceplate. A plurality of small diameter

access holes, here four, are indicated at 15, 16, 17 and 18, two in each of the style lines 13 and 14. It will be understood that although the presence of the style lines is desirable they are not essential. Their presence does however tend to further disguise the access holes 15-18. As will be seen hereafter, it is preferable that the holes be no wider than, and preferably slightly smaller than, the width of the style lines although in this instance they are slightly wider than the style line. When faceplate 10 is assembled to similar faceplates to form a group, the access holes are virtually undiscernible to the human eye from a few feet away and the front face 19 becomes simply a portion of a much larger wall space. It is not possible to assign a specific number of feet at which the holes become virtually undiscernible to the human eye. In probably a majority of situations, the access holes become indiscernible to the human eye at about 2-4 feet during daylight conditions.

[16] In Figure 2 a fastening assembly for securing the faceplate 10 to a supporting structure, indicated generally at 21, is indicated at 22. Niche means, to which easy access is being denied by this invention, are indicated at 23 in Figure 3 but have been omitted from Figure 2 for convenience of description.

[17] The right or access end of the fastening assembly as viewed in Figure 2 is received in a rear hole 24 formed in the rear face 25 of faceplate 10. A smaller diameter access hole 15 is formed in the front face 19 of the faceplate 10, said hole 15 being axially concentric with rear hole 24. Hole 15 is formed in the left style line 13. The diameter of hole 15 may range from slightly smaller to slightly larger than the width of style line 13; here it is slightly larger.

[18] The left, or anchor end, of the fastening assembly is received in a hole 28 formed in the wall 29 of supporting structure 21.

[19] The fastening assembly 22 includes a torx security screw, indicated generally at 31, a short piece of tubing, preferably made of stainless steel, indicated generally at 32, and a conventional rivet nut indicated generally at 33.

[20] Rivet nut 33 has a thick base portion 34, which is threaded as at 35 to receive the torx screw 31, and a thin shank portion 36 which terminates in flange 37. Tubing 32 has four slots, three of which are indicated at 38, 39 and 40 in its right or front end. The head 41 of screw 31 has been modified slightly in that the side wall of the head is tapered inwardly as at 42 toward the shank portion 43. The diameter of flat end 26 of head 41 plus double the thickness of the wall of tubing 32, when added together, are slightly less than the diameter of rear hole 24.

[21] Figure 3 illustrates the fastening assembly 22 in an activated condition. Initially the thick base portion 34 and thin shank portion 36 are slid into hole 28 until flange 37 butts against the right outside surface (as viewed in Figure 2) of wall 29 of the supporting structure 21. A tool, not shown, having a snout which has an external thread which mates with thread 35 is then threadably engaged with the threaded hole in base 34. The handles on the tool are closed, forcing the thick base portion 34 with the threaded hole 35 against the inside face of wall 29, crimping the thin shank 36 in the process, until the rivet nut 33 assumes the contour shown in Figure 3; i.e.: with the thin shank portion 36 crimped outwardly to form a flange

51 which, in cooperation with flange 37, locks the rivet nut 33 to the supporting structure. The tool is removed, leaving the rivet nut pre-set in the supporting structure.

[22] Thereafter, tubing 32 is slid onto shank portion 43 of the torx security screw 31 with the end containing slots 38, 39 and 40 butted against the tapered portion 42 of the head 41. Since the length of tubing 32 is shorter than the length of screw shank 43, the threaded end 44 of the screw 31 will project outwardly from the smooth end 45, see Figure 2, of the tubing 32. The threaded end 44 of screw 31 is then threaded a few turns into the threaded hole 35 in the thick base portion 34 of the pre-positioned rivet nut 33. The hole 24 in faceplate 10 is then slipped over the head 41 of torx screw 31 and the slotted end of tubing 32. Further tightening of torx screw 31 drives the threaded end 44 of the screw 31 deeper into the threaded hole 35 of the rivet nut 33. As the screw turns in deepening engagement with threaded hole 35 the prongs which are formed between the slots, two of which are illustrated at 47 and 48 in Figure 2, begin to expand outwardly into tight engagement with the inner circular wall of rear hole 24 of faceplate 10 under the expanding force of tapered surface 42 on head 41.

[23] From Figure 3 it will be seen that the above described components are so contoured that when the tapered head 42 of torx screw 31 has wedged the elastically deformable prongs 47, 48 into tight engagement with the wall surface of hole 24, the face 26 of torx screw 31 is spaced a slight distance inwardly from hole seat 20.

[24] The torx screw 31 is activated by the torx screwdriver indicated generally at 54

in Figure 4. Screwdriver 54 has a handle 55, a shank, indicated generally at 56, and a head indicated generally at 57. Head 57 terminates in six ribs, two of which are indicated at 58 and 59 in Figures 4 and 5. All six ribs are shown in Figure 5 but are not numbered for purposes of clarity.

[25] Referring now to Figure 7 it will be seen that torx screw head 41 has a star shaped socket indentation 53 having six seats formed therein, said socket matching the fluted or ribbed head 57 of screwdriver 54. Two seats 60 and 61 of the socket 53 would receive flutes or ribs 58 and 59 of the head 57 of the screwdriver. Thus, the further the screwdriver 54 drives the threaded shank 43 of screw 31 into the thick end 34 of rivet nut 33, the greater will be the outward jamming pressure on the prongs 47, 48 etc. and consequently the tighter will be the connection between faceplate 10 and supporting structure 21.

[26] The torx screw head 41 has a center pin 63 which mates with recess 64 in the head 57 of screwdriver 54.

[27] It will be understood that rivet nuts and torx screwdrivers are off the shelf items and indeed such conventional components are used in the invention. However, the conventional, as purchased condition of the screwdriver is preferably modified by reducing the diameter of the shank 56 at the engagement end thereof. Thus, outer section 62 of shank 56 has a smaller diameter than that portion 65 of the shank next to the handle 55. At the same time the socket 53 is of a smaller than conventional size so as to, firstly, match the configuration of the flutes 58, 59 on head 57 of the screwdriver, and secondly to decrease

the diameter of front hole 15 of faceplate 10 so that a standard sized torx screwdriver cannot gain access to the socket 53 in the top surface 26 of the tapered end 42 of the torx screw 31.

[28] In operation, after assembly of the screw 31, tubing 32 and rivet nut-nut 33 with hole 28 in supporting structure 21, the torx screwdriver is applied just sufficiently to snug up the assembled parts. After four such assemblies have been so assembled to the supporting structure, as represented by access holes 15, 16, 17 and 18 of Figure 1, the faceplate 10 is then slid onto the outwardly projecting assemblies. Once the faceplate is received on the four fastening assemblies, the torx screwdriver 54 engages screw 31 through hole 15 to cause the taper 42 on the head of the screw to expand the prongs 38, 39, etc. outwardly into engagement with the bore wall of hole 24. Preferably the prongs are deformed, as indicated in Figure 3, to an extent less than their elastic limit. Stainless steel is the preferred material for tubing 32 and its associated prongs 38, 39.

[29] When it is desired to activate the niche behind faceplate 10 at a future date -- which may be years after initial installation -- the torx screwdriver 54 rotates the screw 31 in the opposite direction, the prongs relax, and the faceplate 10 is lifted off. After the niche is filled with an urn or other object and sealed, the faceplate is again attached to the supporting structure as above described and the screw 31 is tightened as hard as possible so that removal of the faceplate is made as difficult as possible.

[30] Although torx screwdrivers are available in standard sizes, the inability of a torx screwdriver of a standard size to be used to loosen screw 31 is prevented by reducing the

diameter of the shank section 62 and the head 57 to a size intermediate two standard torx screwdriver sizes. As a result, a standard size torx screwdriver whose diameter is slightly larger than faceplate hole 15, that is, the width of shank portion 65, cannot enter hole 15, and the next smaller standard size torx screwdriver will have a head too small to engage the seats 60, 61 etc. in head 41 with enough gripping force to rotate screw 31.

[31] Although a specific embodiment has been described in detail it will at once be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications can be made within the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, it is intended that the scope of the invention not be limited by the foregoing exemplary description, but rather only by the scope of the hereafter appended claims when interpreted in light of the relevant prior art.